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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED CLASSIFICATION LINE)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/15/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ES](#)
SUBJECT: FUNES ABSENT FROM FMLN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Classified by the Charge for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On October 10th, El Salvador's leftist FMLN party (Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional) celebrated the 29th anniversary of its founding, notably without the participation of either President Funes or the "Friends of Mauricio." The absence of Funes and Friends indicates a growing rift between party hardliners and the President, despite FMLN claims to the contrary. End Summary.

12. (C) El Salvador's leftist FMLN party celebrated the 29th anniversary of its founding October 10 in San Salvador, though without the participation of President Funes, whose attendance at the event had been the subject of much speculation. The conservative newspaper El Diario de Hoy reported that before the event Funes asked FMLN cabinet members to focus on their roles as public servants rather than as party members. Nonetheless, some FMLN members defied the implied prohibition, stating to the press that they were merely exercising their rights as citizens. Attendees included Vice President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, Strategic Secretary Franzi Hato Hasbun, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hugo Martinez, Minister of Public Security and Justice Manuel Melgar, FMLN General Coordinator and Legislative Assembly Party Leader Medardo Gonzalez, Vice Minister of Public Transportation Nelson Garcia, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos Castaneda, Vice Minister of Health Violeta Menjivar, and Vice Minister of Labor Calixto Mejia. Funes supporters known as the "Friends of Mauricio" were not invited. A spokesman for the FMLN said that everyone who supported and sympathized with the FMLN was invited, even though they hadn't been given personal invitations.

13. (C) On the eve of the anniversary, La Prensa Grafica newspaper reported that FMLN spokesman Jose Luis Merino supported President Funes' proposal for a "new political, social and economic pact" for the nation, which Merino likened to the Peace Accords that ended the civil war. In other reports, Merino disavowed the September 26 anti-American tirade by Vice President Salvador Sanchez Ceren, and acknowledged that the U.S. acted with "respect and neutrality" in this year's elections. Noting an interview in which the Charge referred to the U.S. Embassy as "contributing to depolarization in the country," Merino said the FMLN would take him at his word.

14. (C) Merino is one of the most powerful hard liners in the FMLN, with close ties to Cuba, Venezuela, and the FARC. He said at the anniversary event that the FMLN holds to its socialist utopian ideals with an aim of creating a society where all Salvadorans feel they are a part, but with the participation of private business. However, he described this socialist vision as one where businessmen create the wealth, and the government "distributes these riches equally."

15. (U) Newspapers reported statements of unity with Funes from both Gonzalez and Sanchez Ceren. They and Merino blamed the media for the division. Gonzalez stated that the FMLN

and Funes are "now united more than ever," and discounted "rumors" of a division, but also said that the ideals of the eighties remain intact in the FMLN as it "takes the reins of the Executive." He said the country needed "profound" changes, and referred to "structural" problems. Sanchez Ceren proudly affirmed the party's radical ideals and stated that the FMLN has now begun "mastering the art of political struggle." One article quoted Sanchez Ceren stating flatly that "the FMLN is Schafik Handal and Schafik Handal is the FMLN." Handal was the party's much-idolized former leader and 2004 presidential candidate, who died in 2006 after attending the inauguration of Evo Morales in Bolivia.

¶6. (C) Comment: The moderate Funes continues to distance himself from the hard-line FMLN. As hardliners continue to spout the rhetoric of the past, Funes carries on, enjoying high popular support that the party cannot ignore. He does not, however, appear to be able to discipline his party. The fact that the FMLN is celebrating its pre-war revolutionary/guerrilla beginnings, and not its founding as a political party in 1992, is a telling indication of the ongoing influence of hardline elements within the party. Statements affirming the radical agenda of the party belie comments that appear to support Funes.

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